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SUBJECT: POLITICAL PARTY YOUTH LEADERS OFFER LITTLE BUT RHETORIC

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¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a country where over half of the population is under 25 and job opportunities for young people are scarce, political parties have had little trouble in the recent past mobilizing youth for violent ends during times of political crisis. In light of the looming November 30th election deadline, the PolEcon Chief and PolOff met with youth leaders from the major political parties to gauge their opinions on how youth might play a role in the electoral process given the current political climate. Although all of the leaders agreed that youth unemployment continues to be a serious problem, pre-election political party activities offer little in the way of solutions. END SUMMARY

¶12. (SBU) The PolEcon Chief and PolOff met with youth leaders from the three main political parties - the Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI), Rassemblement des Republicains (RDR), and the Parti Democratique de la Cote d'Ivoire (PDCI) -- as well as two of the smaller parties active in politics, the Parti Ivoirien des Travailleurs (PIT) and the Mouvement des Forces de l'Avenir (MFA). All were quick to state that unemployment is a major problem for young people in Cote d'Ivoire. Despite the consensus however, political parties are doing little to address the problem. FPI youth president Navigue Konate told Emboffs that the FPI has youth programs, but cannot put them into place because the government is focusing on elections and the "unicite des caisses" is not really functional. (Note: "unicite des caisses" is the process through which the government is trying to reassert its authority to collect taxes in areas held by the New Forces.) The only jobs available, says Navigue and PDCI youth president Konan Bertin Kouadio, are in government -- a situation which was exacerbated by the drop off in private sector employment opportunities since the country's political crisis began in 2002.

¶13. (SBU) Political parties' lack of programs targeting youth have not dissuaded them from campaigning around the country, trying to drum up support among their parties' younger constituents. When Emboffs asked why youth projects are not being implemented, the oft-repeated refrain was that nothing substantive can happen until elections take place. The two smaller parties (PIT, MFA) also cited a lack of funding. Both PIT and MFA, however, had clear party platforms that they outlined for Emboffs; the PDCI and RDR youth leaders would not provide details.

¶14. (SBU) What all of the youth leaders did agree on was that the possibility of seeing the types of violent youth mobs that militant youth leader Ble Goude mobilized in 2004 has considerably decreased (see Reftel). Although there are still some "extremists" who are loyal to Ble Goude, Kouadio (PDCI) says Ble Goude's influence with young people has declined and he can no longer organize the sheer numbers of people he once could. MFA youth leader Simeon Kpanhi and PIT youth president Guillaume Tano both attribute this decline in Ble Goude's influence to an overall change in young people's perceptions. They believe that having seen Ble Goude and other FPI leaders enrich themselves while their young followers continue to remain poor has resulted in a steady loss of support since the height of the crisis.

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